

Free to Witness



1 Peter 2:13–17

Bro. Ricky Cunningham

If you've been coming to Hardin very long, you know that one of our core beliefs is identity determines behavior. It's just a core belief of Hardin. As I have preached through books of the Bible for 40 years, we have come to believe that the Bible teaches identity—who we are—determines behavior what we do. If that's true that who we are determines what we do, identity determines behavior, then it means this is true: behavior reveals identity. So if I want to see who you are, I should just be able to watch what you do, and eventually the way you conduct your life will reveal to me your identity. Peter has been hammering on identity—we are a chosen race, we are a royal priesthood, we are a holy nation, we are a people for His possession. Then last week, we discovered that we're also a sojourner and an exile. Wow. And because of our identity, Peter is telling us that we need to remember there is a war that we must win. That war is not a war without; it's a war within. Even though we are a saint of God, a Christian, we still have an unredeemed flesh. From time to time, our unredeemed flesh is going to be at war with our spirit and our inner flesh is going to induce some things that the spirit within us and the Spirit of God and God our Father would not want us to participate in. So Peter tells us we have to win this war with the passions of our flesh. There's a reason. It's because he wants the Gentiles, the code for unbelievers, to see our conduct and our

conduct to be honorable. Why? Because God wants people to see what you're doing...your good deeds that reveal who you are, so that ultimately it will glorify Him on the day of visitation. Has anybody ever told you to do something you didn't want to do? Sure. Then the moment you resisted, they just wouldn't quit? Because of the relationship they had with you, they reminded you of who you were and you could do this, and you were going to do this, but you didn't want to. That may be where we're going to be at this morning in this message. I want to be upfront. Let's see what Peter's going to tell us to do that probably our flesh is going to struggle a little bit with. And maybe you have your flesh so under control that this will not give you a problem and you can just sleep during the message, but if you struggle a little bit with this, I'm going to ask you to stay awake, stay alert because this is so, so very important.

Scripture

"Be subject [this means be submissive] for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor."

Now, you know who the emperor would be in our day. These are not my words; these are the Apostle Peter's words who, every one of us in here believes when he wrote these words, was inspired by God's Holy Spirit. Which means, we believe this is God's Word, spoken not just to a church living in the Roman Empire but to a church living in Western Kentucky that meets in little town called Hardin. Amen? If you read out of the King James Version of the Bible or the New King James Version of the Bible, you will notice that your verse begins with a word that those of us who read the ESV do not have. Because I noticed this in my study, I checked out the Greek New Testament, and the King James is more accurate than the ESV. The King James and the New King James says, "Therefore" be subject. At Hardin, we love that word, therefore, right? Every time we see that word, it

reminds us to stop and see what it's there for. "Therefore" is a connecting word. Those of us who have studied English grammar already realize that even though this is a new paragraph, it's continuing the same thought. The same thought is Peter is expressing identity, and because of our identity, he now expects our behavior to match our identity. He expects what we do to reveal who we are. He's just reminded us that we are sojourners and we are exiles, meaning this is not our home. But while we're here, we're in a battle. We've still got an unredeemed flesh and God wants to move us further and further away from the image of Adam and more and more the image of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Now, Peter knows there is a lot of talk in the community that's not correct. There's a misunderstanding about who the church is, so he's encouraging the church that the only thing's going to get the world to see who they are is not by what they say but by what they do. He wants the unbelievers to see their honorable behavior. He wants them to see their good deeds. Do you know what the first deed he's going to tell us they need to see is? That we are a submissive people. I just want to let that sink in. I don't know about you, but when I fight my unredeemed flesh, my unredeemed flesh is normally leading me to put me ahead of others. It's a 'me first' kind of thing. It's kind of a 'make me great' kind of thing. This paragraph, the next paragraph, the next paragraph, it's going to again be saying, "be subject."

Peter's going to tell servants you have to be submissive to your master. Imagine that you've been bought and sold and you belong to another, and you go to church and Peter tells you to be submissive to your master, even when he's unjust to you. And then, he gives you an example—the example is Christ. When all those unjust things happened to Christ, He suffered but His suffering brought grace to us, and He's going to tell the servants this is actually a gracious thing in your life when you suffer. Wow. Then Peter's going to tell the ladies of the church to be subject to their husbands. Every lady in here knows what that means, because you're subject to your husbands, correct? And he's going to highlight even those ladies who are married to an unbelieving husband—you don't get an exemption—you still have to be subject. Then at the end of the letter, he's going to tell the

younger ones in the church who are just coming into the faith, when you see your elders, subject yourself to them. How are you doing?

Therefore, based on who we are and that God wants unbelievers to see our life, do you know what Peter wants them to see in our life?

Submissiveness. But he doesn't start with ladies, he doesn't begin with children like Paul does, and he doesn't begin with servants; he begins with all of us in the church being submissive to (are you ready for this?) human institutions, in particular, the emperor and his governors. Peter reminds the church living in the Roman Empire that we submit to the emperor as supreme. When it comes to human authority in that day, he was the supreme authority. Peter says to the church, to the Christian—submit. This is not Bro. Ricky; it's Peter. The word, submit, is a military word, *hupotasso*, that means 'to be under for order.' It pictures that authority structure in the military. There are people over and there are people under, and the reason there are people over and there are people under is so that when the military goes to battle we need to be on the same page. We need to all be going in the same direction. We need to be in one accord and authority brings that one accord-ness. You do not want to be in an army on a battlefield without authority because when it goes bad for the army on the battlefield and they lose, it goes bad for those of us at home. Those of you who have been in United States Army, you know the discipline of the army. You know there's a reason they used to call it boot camp. I've had man after man tell me how, literally, the will of the soldier is broken. If there's one thing you don't question, you do not question authority. You follow order, because there will come a time when that will save your life, and not just your life, but the life of those back home you are fighting for.

Many of us struggle to submit to human authority, especially to a president, or to a governor. Peter said to an emperor, so let me remind you of who was emperor—it was a Caesar named Nero. Have you read about him? You could take every president we've had, take every bad trait they've had, put them all together, multiply them by two, and it doesn't come close to this guy. Do you know what this guy actually did? He wanted to entertain, not just during the day; he wanted to entertain at night. To

entertain at night, he would take Christians and tar and oil them and put them on poles. When the sun would start to go down, he would set them on fire, and then he would have a lavish party at the palace. I read this week that one of his hobbies was racing his chariot on his track. He got tired of racing his chariot in the day so he decided to race his chariot at night. Do you know who lit the track at night? Christians. And under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Peter tells the church living under Nero to submit to him as supreme. And to those governors Nero sends out to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good, Peter says submit to them also.

Can I just bring all of us as Christians back to reality in Hardin, Kentucky? Praise God we do not have a man like that. Praise God there's not a day when we have to acknowledge he is lord. We're a republic. We do not have one man that rules us; we have a representative government that represents us. We vote for them in office, and when we vote for them in office, they make decisions on our behalf. They are not always the decisions we would want them to make but when those decisions are made, as Christians, we submit. I see it in your face—your unredeemed flesh is struggling. Probably only because we're a verse by verse through the Bible preaching church would we even address this. With what's been going on politically the last four, five, six, eight years in our nation, it's not a popular subject, but it doesn't change the Word of God. There is an action that God expects of us as His followers that reveal our identity, and that action is an attitude and action of submissiveness to government authority. Ours happens to be three branches: legislative branch with the House of Representative and the Senate; executive branch with the president and an administration; judicial branch, starting with the Supreme Court.

Now, why do we submit to them? Because they make right decisions? No. We hope they make right decisions, but Peter is saying for the Lord's sake. Please hear this. You can reject this when you get home if you want to reject this but please do not reject it right now...just listen. We don't do this for our sake and we don't do it for their sake; we do it for the Lord's sake. That's Jesus. Wow! Can you imagine being that group of people who

has an emperor who believes he's lord, and now you're being reminded that you're not doing this for his sake you're doing it for your Lord's sake, which is Jesus? Wow. Let's be honest here. We do stuff all the time, not for our sake but other people's sake. Agreed? And if we're being honest, we usually don't like it, because if we liked doing it we wouldn't do it for their sake, we would do it for our sake, but we're doing it for their sake.

We have animals, lots of animals on our farm. Now, there are two animals that I just don't...well, let me just say...I'm not a horse lover. I will say I'm not even a horse liker. Not too long ago, Memish came to me and she said, "Can we get Evie Kate a horse?" "Where are we going to put it?" "Front pasture." I said, "Well, I'll have to sell five cows for that one horse," but I agreed. Then, we had to get another horse, Layton Aniston, and Mae Mae. That's five more cows gone. But here was the clincher—all I had to do was give up the front pasture. I was never going to have to do anything for the horses at all. How many of you believe that? I believed it! Do you know what I have to do from time to time? Sometimes, four, maybe five times a week, I'm the one who goes to the barn right before dark, and mucks the barn. I don't know why we call it mucking the barn; we ought to call it yucking the barn. You know, we have on the pasture for all of those cows...when everything that's inside them comes out, it just stays where it is. But if you have a horse, you can't leave it where it is. So I have to get in a little stall and I have to take a little instrument, and everything that was in them is now in little piles—I have to do that—me, who does not like horses! And then, there's the liquid form! All of it has to come out every night into a MULE, and then that's not all. We have to put hay in a special net and hang it just right. And then, water...oh they have to have clean water every day. Which means if they didn't drink all of their water, I have pour that water out, clean out their bucket, and fill that up with fresh water, and then feed them, then close the door, and turn a light on for them in the barn so it will not be too dark. Do you hear me say this? Do you think that's on my bucket list to want to do? Do you know why I do it? For the sake of those girls in my life, for the sake of that number one girl in my life I do it.

Do you know why we have an attitude in the church of submissiveness toward others even those in higher authority? It's because of our Lord. It's for His sake. It's important to Him and because it's important to Him, it has to be important to us that we do this. Now, I'll be honest with you; I'm kind of liking the two horses a little bit. Do you know why my attitude is changing? Because of how important this is to somebody else in my life. Peter didn't tell us we do this for our sake and he doesn't tell us we do this for Rome's sake; He tells us to do it for the Lord's sake. So, I have to ask you, if you're a Christian, to let your behavior reveal who you are. Are you a chosen race? Are you a royal priesthood? Are you a holy nation? Are you a people of His possession? Are you a sojourner? Are you an exile? Then Peter says the way we reveal that is our attitude toward human institutions. Now, Peter is not going to just say that and move on. He's now going to explain this, because listen; do you think you're struggling as a Democrat who has to put up with a Republican president, or a Republican who has to put up with a Democratic president? Can you imagine Nero? He says, "For this is the will of God..." Everybody's always wondering what God's will is. Well, I'm going to tell you what God's will is, "For this is the will of God, that by doing good you put to silence the ignorance of foolish people." Now, in the context here, what's the doing good? The doing good is being submissive to governing authorities. So what's God's will? It's for us to submit to government authorities and other human institutions, and as we do, we do good and when we do good, guess what we do? We muzzle. That's what the word silence means here. We muzzle ignorance of foolish people.

See, what we sometimes want to do as Christians is to get into mouth-to-mouth combat and have debates. But that's not God's will in this era only; He says I want people to see you, I want them to see this good action of yours of being submissive, bringing yourself under the authority of others. Then what's going to happen is all of those things that are being said about the church, like 'the way they speak evil,' and other things Kory mentioned last week—your actions going to put a muzzle on that. It's going to stop their ignorance because they're fools. Why didn't some of us think of that before? We can't think that way because of our flesh. Our flesh won't let us, our flesh is into men; our flesh is into protecting us and

what's ours. But God has a bigger plan for you. He wants to hush people up. So watch this...all of a sudden somebody's going to see you or another Christian, and then down at the store or down at the ballgame or in the business world, somebody's going to say something about you or that other Christian, and somebody's going to step up and say, "No, I know him," or "I know her, you're wrong. That's not who those people are." And all of the slander, and all of the wrong, and all the evil about the church is going to stop because people are not going to believe what they've heard. They're going to believe what they've seen, and that's you and that's me. Wow.

What's the next thing Peter tells us? "Live as people who are free..." Now, some of you have just thought your freedom is being taken away from you. No. Peter is encouraging us to live as free people. But listen, it's not free to do what you want; it's free to do what you ought. You and I don't determine the 'ought,' if we're Christians. He says live as people who are free, and then he puts a 'not,' "...not using your freedom as a cloak [or a coat] for evil." Talking about things that are wrong, things that your unredeemed flesh would like to engage in. No, we're not going to use Christian freedom that way. He says, "...living as [look at this, this is not Bro. Ricky, this is Word of God] servants of God." This is another identity marker. We're not only a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his possession, sojourners, exiles; we are servants of God. Are you following? In the letter that Peter wrote to the church, he used the Greek word, *doulas*, which was the word for that slave who got sold, he got bought, he went to a new place, and it did not matter what his will was; his will is now subject to the will of the master. Can we imagine that? We can't imagine that. You have to see that picture...your will isn't your will; it belongs to someone else. That's who you are. You were bought with a price—you were paid for by God when He put His Son Jesus on that cross so that He could redeem you from sin and set you free, but the only way you can be free is by serving Him.

Let me ask you a question. Do you know you are a servant? Did you have any battles this week where you really want to do something, but then you reminded yourself...*I just don't need to do that because that's not who I*

am? I'm a doulas of God. See, this is why the verses before it tell us we've got to go to war against the passions of our unredeemed flesh! We can't let them win or we'll make the situation about us instead of making the situation about others. We are servants of God. Our will is in subjection to God, so when it comes to the area of authority and our lack in human institutions, if I'm His servant, I subject my will to His will. And what's His will? For me to submit. Why? For His sake, so that His will can be revealed in our life through the good deed we're going to do, which is going to close the mouth of the unbelievers. Wow...what a God!

Then, Peter is going to make a summary statement. In our English Bibles, he says, "Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God." (Ahhh Peter, why did you have to do this?) "Honor the emperor." Can I just remind those in Western Kentucky who that is? It's President Biden. (Peter, why didn't you just stop with fearing God?) In the letter he wrote to the church, because the Greek language can be a little different it reads differently. Here's what it says; it's like a list:

All Honor. Brotherhood love. God fear. Emperor Nero honor.

We as Christians, because we are servants of God, honor all people. It doesn't mean we agree with all people, it doesn't mean we honor people all the same way, but the lowest of the low, the scoundrel of the scoundrels, we know, as Christians, still bear some resemblance of the image of God and we know and hope and believe they are still redeemable. Therefore, we give what honor we can. We place what value we can on them. When it comes to the family, we love each other. We have a big, big family...do you know what the core quality is in us? We love one another. Jesus told us by this the world will know we are His disciples...by the way we love one another just as He loved us. Now Peter is saying when it comes to a brother or sister, you love, love meaning what? We love them not for what we get but we love them for what we can give. This doesn't mean we tolerate sin in the life of the family but it means we try to elevate that need to place a priority, and we're doing this not because of something within us, we're doing this because of something in them because we're family.

When it comes to God, we fear Him. This word, fear, is where we get our word, phobia, from. It means to be frightened of, to be terrified; it means to shake, to tremble; it means to run away from. Our God is holy, holy, holy. The Seraphim, who stand and minister in His presence and sing how holy He is, they have to cover their faces, they have to cover their feet because He is so holy! One holy doesn't get it; it's holy, holy, holy! It is the only attribute of God elevated to the third superlative in Scripture. But as this word is applied to Him, it doesn't mean that we as believers run away from Him, He's our Dad, but it does mean we we're in awe of Him, we reverence Him, we worship Him. Here's why I think Peter is doing what he's doing—if we are in awe of God and who He is, then we know who we are and we don't put ourselves in the same category as Him. Therefore, when it comes down to a decision where we're going to do it our way or His way, which way are we going to do it? His way. Why? Because we're scared to do it our way. Because if there's a choice between His way and our way, His way is best. If I do it my way, it could be disastrous so I'm going to go His way. Now, what's the context here? We have a choice. What's our behavior going to be toward those who have authority over us? I'm going to submit because of my fear of God and because of my love for you. And because I see people as being valuable, I'm going to trust that God knows what's best and I'm not going to do my thing, I'm going to do His thing.

Peter starts his paragraph by telling me that I have to be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, and then he gives me two in particular, the emperor and his governors. Now he closes his paragraph by saying, honor the emperor, which means what? If you're a Christian, you have to put value on our president, whether you voted for him or not, whether you agree with him or not, you have to honor him. I'm going to just tell you what we better not be doing as a church—we better not be following or saying that little "Let's go Brandon" thing. You are not hurting him when you do that, you're hurting your Lord because that is not who we are. We are servants of God. We want to do His will. So when it comes to the world seeing good deeds, we might pick four or five others and not this one, but this is the one that Peter starts with because it conveys the heart of God.

Now, can I just say this? The ones among us who are having the most trouble are us men. Can I just remind you that the Bible's going to use the same word to tell your wife to submit to you? If you're struggling to submit to government authority, just imagine how she's struggling to submit to you. I know...I get it, but this is the Word of God. Wouldn't you like to change the world's attitude about the church? Let's remember who we are. We are servants of God. Now, let's do whatever we do for His sake because He knows best.